

Abraham Lincoln.

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See File No. 651.

Sacredly conspicuous in the calendar of the Nation is this day of remembrance and reverence, when the old age and youth of the country, standing in the edifice of a great history, bow in homage before its greatest hero. Into the story of the Republic, from 1861 to 1865, patriotism does well to enter, there to find, for instruction and example and manly worship, the manliest of Americans, the highest type of American citizenship, the central figure of this American century -- Abraham Lincoln. We breathe to-night the atmosphere of a glorious epoch; we hold reverential communion with its loftiest spirit.

The ridicule and rancor, the passions of politics, and the fierce partisanship which assailed him during his short life of leadership, exhausted themselves almost within their day, and each year as it goes serves but to exalt in the estimation of mankind his character and work.

The judgment of time, which is the fairest critic, has already shown to be colossal, him who was once called commonplace, and raised the humble citizen of the republic to the standard of the heroic.

The honor we offer to his memory is only our spontaneous accord with the calm conclusions of historic criticism; our enthusiasm is but an ardent expression of the world's conservative thinking.

This Lincoln Day is for us, for our teaching, inspiring, strengthening. It is no ordinary holiday, but a solemn, earnest time for thought and hope and promise. To this day we come as to an ancient shrine; to this great man as to a Moses of his people. Our theme is broader than biography. Every school-boy knows the dates and deeds of Lincoln. There is not a home in the land whose firelight has not illumined, for the eye of age and childhood, the printed pages of his birth, his life, his death; the scholar in his philosophy, the man of action, the high and low, everywhere, the old and young know by heart the details of the book of this man's life. The record of his career is the common literature of the country. For many years, in all lands, gifted speech has proclaimed him; the writers of history have recounted his events; the pen of poetry has sketched his virtues. In all the line of leadership, Lincoln's life is the great familiar fact in the American mind. Thus does he have his tribute from the people.

We contemplate, for one brief moment, Abraham Lincoln in the largeness of his attributes; his general influence on mankind. This is an old contemplation, but it wears like truth; it is never threadbare; it is like a lofty story of morals or religion, which constantly assumes a fascinating newness for our faith and interest.

In his mentality he shone in judgment, common sense, consistency, persistence, knowledge of men.

In his words he was candid and frank, but accurate and concise, speaking sturdy Anglo-Saxon unadorned, powerful in its simplicity and the subdued enthusiasm of earnest thought.

In his sentiments he was kind and patient and brave. No leader ever more completely combined in his personality the graces of gentleness with rugged determination.

In his morals, Truth was his star; Honesty the vital air of his living. In his religion he was faithful as a saint; Providence was his stay; he walked with God.

As President, his life and declarations were a constant sermon. The solemn air which colored this man's career was the pathos of faith. No man has lived in high station in America by whom the religious fact was more regarded.

He was more than a politician, as the word is used. His plans were based on his convictions of the right and his belief in the correctness of men's ultimate judgments, and the conscience of the people inspiring them.

Publicly, he was a diplomat, who with keenest analysis corrected the state papers of a great premier; a man of military genius, who changed the plans of generals, and successfully

modified theories of campaigns. In his leadership he marched with his people; kept step with his soldiers; his cabinet was the country.

Fundamentally, the two vital characteristics of Abraham Lincoln were his love of men and his faith in God. Poverty had schooled him to pity, and taught the general equality of all mankind. He hated human slavery, and in Illinois, more than a half century ago, made protest against it as a barbarism; he longed for its destruction, and gladly seized the legal occasion for making free the four millions of American slaves.

His faith in God was persistent as his life. No defeat of an army, nor what seemed at times a loss of popular confidence, nor most threatening dangers for the nation, could sweep him from that anchor.

If asked what deep impress was made by Abraham Lincoln on what is called the politics of the country, we point to the remembered lessons, the permeating example of his honesty, the religious sense of right which animated him, his confidence in the people, and his patience for them to reach his righteous level, and his constant fidelity to principle and to the men who helped him maintain it. His lofty ideas of nationality and liberty and Providence lifted politics to the heights of patriotism and human rights.

If asked what lasting impress the attributes and career of this great man have made on human life, we point to his universal recognition and tribute of mankind. The judgments and hearts of men in all lands proclaim the power of his influence. Look abroad, and find if you can, a character in this century whose precept and example did more among men to magnify kindness and the simple humanities. The very passions of war, its hostilities and hate, were alleviated by the paternal and generous sentiments of the president, whose constant personal tenderness in private walk and public declaration kept in the heart of the country the treasure of charity.

Treason itself, at the last, when conquered by patriotism, lamented the death of him in whose magnanimity it had hoped. To the influence of Lincoln shaping the generous sentiments of the North in the national victory of 1865, the New South of this day must proclaim her gratitude. He taught that the passion of war should not linger in the presence of peace.

Abraham Lincoln was the vindication of poverty. He gave glory to the lowly. In the light of his life the cabin became conspicuous; the commonest toil no longer common, and the poor man's hardship a road to honor. It put shame on the prejudice of wealth and birth, and dignity on common manhood. The poor received from him inspiring hope; he taught the humblest youth that there was for him a path to power.



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What were his achievements? He rose by the force of his peculiar attributes from the lowliest station to the highest place, hewing his path by patient resolution and unaided by the ordinary helps of family and wealth.

Beyond the limits of his own state he forced acknowledgment of his strength; from a great political party of intellect and statesmanship, won honor in a marvelous historic debate, wherein were involved vital questions of the republic; by his skill, his knowledge of the country and its politics, his comprehension of the national situation and crisis, his accuracy and prudence of expression raised himself conspicuous beyond Illinois, and throughout the North made men think of him as a leader long before he was chosen.

An untried man, unlettered in statecraft, not trained in diplomacy nor familiar by experience with the larger methods of government, elected the head of the nation in its most perilous period, when the spirit of rebellion was already defiant in the land, the national legislature resounding with senatorial treason, the very capitol breathing an air of hostility to patriotism -- Lincoln took the helm of the government.

What need to tell to men this day the story of our captain in the four years' peril of the ship of state; of his steady hand, his constant courage, his midnight prayer, his eye

on the stars and his faith in God!

What need, when among us there still remain with fresh memory of the dangerous voyage, men who were sailors at the mast under our captain, or mates of the ship; when heroes of that stormy time live to add glory to a day like this!

Lincoln's knowledge of human character, his discrimination as to men's capacities, displayed from the appointment of the ministers in his first cabinet to the end of his presidency were Napoleonic in their success.

Personal feeling, or prejudice swayed him not; his selections and his support of them came from a wise brain inspired by a patriotic heart. Thus around him were gathered such lieutenants as the great secretaries in the civic government, Seward, Stanton, Chase and men like these; in the war, Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, Farragut, Porter, and all those splendid spirits to whom and to whose comrades, titled and untitled, living and dead, we give homage as to the saviors of the republic.

Finally, the chief glory of Abraham Lincoln among men, the deed of his life most expressive of his personality, of his justice, of his humanity, of his yielding to the guidance of God, was the conspicuous act of the century, the freeing of the slaves.

Consider it as you may, the result of conditions and the answer to a demand; regard it as you will, the conscience that

met the call of country and humanity and the hand that gladly and bravely framed the warrant of freedom, were the conscience and the hand of one among the million.

He struck the iron from bondage and bade a race stand free.

He placed his hand on four million human faces and bade them look aloft; his paternal eye inspired four million human minds with dream and hope and high resolve for better life; his words went sun-like into the darkness of a whole people, and for them illuminated a mighty future. He touched, with a proclamation, a chord of human nature which went beyond the continent, went through all lands the whole world round, went through the hearts of all the sons of men, and whose grateful music, grander far than the melodies of the old Hebraic in the jubilee, is the honoring and rejoicing hallelujah of mankind.

Therefore, we stand in the presence of the character of Abraham Lincoln, honoring his memory and reverent to God for the creation of such a manhood.

